

2021 Voluntary Agricultural Districts Virtual Workshop



VAD Reporting Requirements, Farmland Protection Plans, Cost of Community Services Studies, and Administrative Best Practices

Evan Davis – NCDA&CS Farmland Preservation

North Carolina is the Second-Most Threatened State for Farmland Loss in the United States

732,000 Acres of Agricultural Land Converted from 2001 to 2016

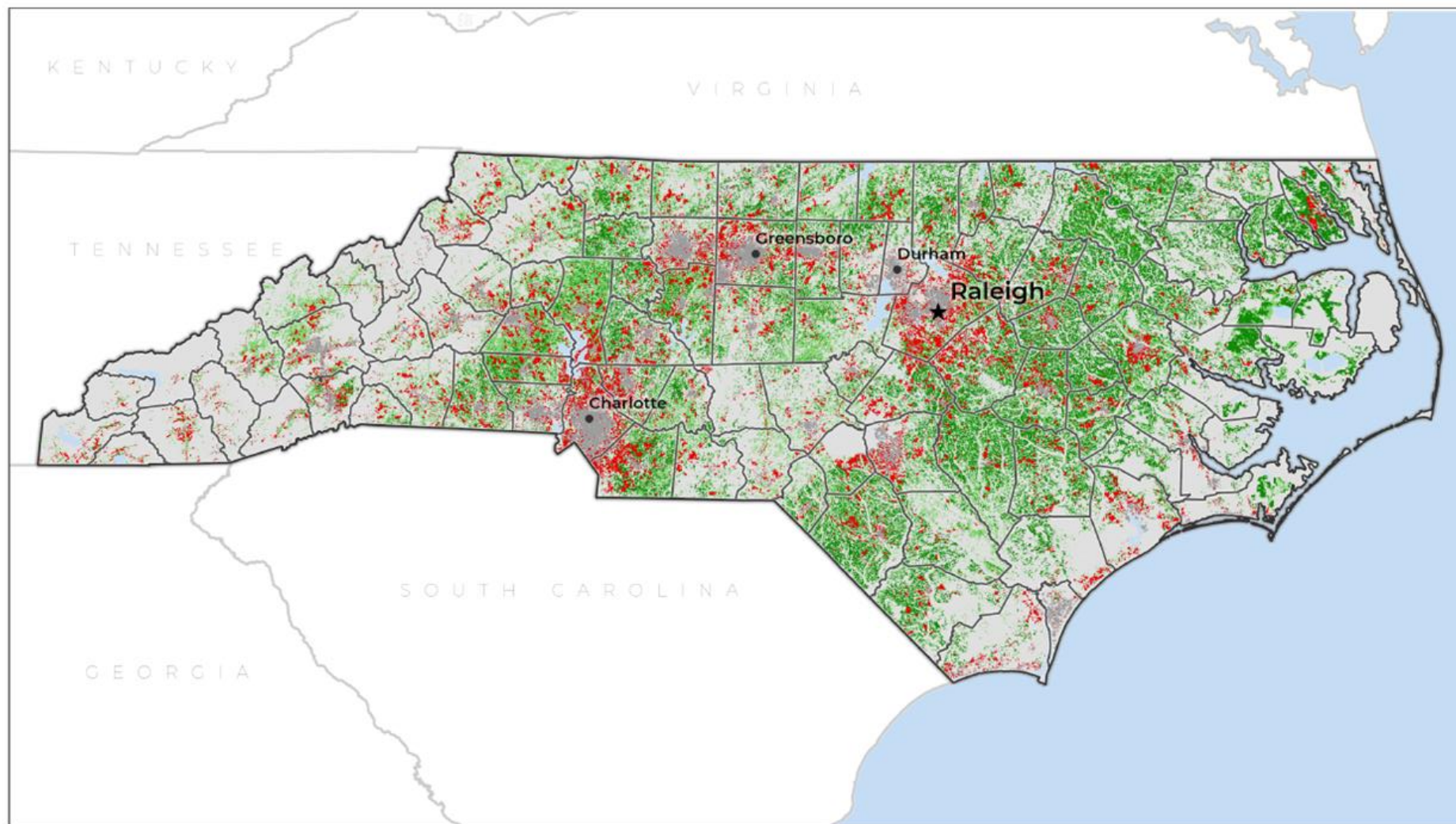
- American Farmland Trust 2020 Report Key Findings
 - Despite North Carolina ranking 30th in the nation in total agricultural acreage, **North Carolina had the second-most number of agricultural land acres lost compared to all other states.**
 - According to the reports, agricultural land is converted to either urban and highly developed (UHD) land use or low-density residential (LDR) land use.
 - In North Carolina between 2001 and 2016, 78 percent of converted agricultural land went to LDR land uses.
 - This means that **571,700 acres of farmland were changed to scattered, large-lot housing developments, the highest conversion rate percentage in the United States.**



North Carolina is the Second-Most Threatened State for Farmland Loss in the United States

- American Farmland Trust 2020 Report Key Findings
 - According to the study, **59 percent of agricultural land in North Carolina is categorized as Nationally Significant Land.**
 - Nationally Significant Land is “the best land for the long-term production of food and fiber...It takes two to three times the amount of marginal agricultural land to make up for the productivity of Nationally Significant Land.”
 - In North Carolina between 2001 and 2016, **387,500 acres of Nationally Significant Land were converted to LRD or UHD land uses.**
 - According to the report, “North Carolina scored among the top states for the conversion of agricultural land to UHD and LDR uses.”
 - At the same time, the relative policy response rate was rated medium.
 - This means that **“the agricultural land conversion threat is higher than its policy response.”**

AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2001-2016



Conversion of non-federal farmland to UHD and LDR land uses from 2001-2016. The threat to working farms and ranches is pervasive, often claiming the most productive, versatile, and resilient lands.



Conversion of agricultural land to UHD and LDR land uses

Farmland* that is:
Above state median PVR**
Below state median PVR



Urban areas
Federal, forest,
and other lands

*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

** Our productivity, versatility, and resiliency (PVR) index helps identify high-quality agricultural land (see page 2).

Why Preserve Farms and Forests in North Carolina?

- Agriculture and agribusiness is North Carolina's top industry, accounting for one-sixth of the state's income and employees.
- Agriculture and agribusiness amounts for more than 16 percent, or \$92.7 billion, of the \$564 billion gross state product.
- Working lands provide fresh, local foods to North Carolina residents and quality products to the agriculture, forestry and fiber industries.
- Agriculture is a compatible industry with the military and military training, which is second in economic importance in the state at \$66 billion.
- Working lands provide scenic rural landscapes for tourism, the third largest economic sector in North Carolina.
- Farms and forests are critical in providing a healthy environment. Working lands are actively managed by farmers, providing key benefits like erosion control, carbon sequestration and waterway buffers.
- Cost of community services studies in the state show that agricultural lands use less tax dollars than they generate. Working lands are a net provider of local tax dollars, rather than a net user.

www.NCVAD.org



North Carolina Department of
Agriculture & Consumer Services

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Voluntary Agricultural Districts



[Click Here to Register for the 2021 Virtual Voluntary Agricultural Districts Workshop - June 9 and 10](#)

Voluntary Agricultural Districts Benefits:

- Encourages the preservation and protection of farmland and working forests.
- Allows landowners to publicly recognize their farms.
- Establishes an Agricultural Advisory Board in the county.
- May protect farms from negative impacts, such as waivers of water and sewer assessments, and public hearings for proposed condemnation.
- Allows for Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts to protect farms from development for 10 years.

Currently, 90 counties in North Carolina have county ordinances for Voluntary Agricultural Districts. Across the state, 12,500 farms and 876,488 acres of working farms and forests are enrolled in the program.

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VAD County Info



Statewide Summary

Alamance	Cumberland	Johnston	Randolph
Alexander	Currituck	Jones	Richmond
Alleghany	Dare	Lee	Robeson
Anson	Davidson	Lenoir	Rockingham
Ashe	Davie	Lincoln	Rowan
Avery	Duplin	McDowell	Rutherford
Beaufort	Durham	Macon	Sampson
Bertie	Edgecombe	Madison	Scotland
Bladen	Forsyth	Martin	Stanly
Brunswick	Franklin	Mecklenburg	Stokes
Buncombe	Gaston	Mitchell	Surry
Burke	Gates	Montgomery	Swain
Cabarrus	Graham	Moore	Transylvania
Caldwell	Granville	Nash	Tyrrell
Camden	Greene	New Hanover	Union
Carteret	Guilford	Northampton	Vance
Caswell	Halifax	Onslow	Wake

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Alamance County

Coordinating Entity: Alamance County Soil and Water

Contact Name: Brad Moore

Contact Phone: 336-290-0380

Contact Email: brad.moore@alamance-nc.com

Alamance County VAD Website: <https://www.alamance-nc.com/swcd/programs/farmland-preservation/>

[Alamance County VAD Ordinance](#)

[Alamance County Farmland Protection Plan](#)

[Alamance County Cost of Community Services Study](#)

Farms Enrolled in VAD Program: 326

Acres of Farmland Enrolled in VAD Program: 18,091

Farms Enrolled in Enhanced VAD Program: N/A

Acres of Farmland Enrolled in Enhanced VAD Program: N/A

Statistics Last Reported by Alamance County in 2020

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ALAMANCE COUNTY

Model Ordinances and Program Resources

[VAD Model Ordinance - Minimum Statutory Requirements](#)

[VAD Model Ordinance - Comprehensive](#)

[VAD Enrollment and Withdrawal Procedures](#)

[VAD Application and Enrollment Example](#)

[VAD Removal Example](#)

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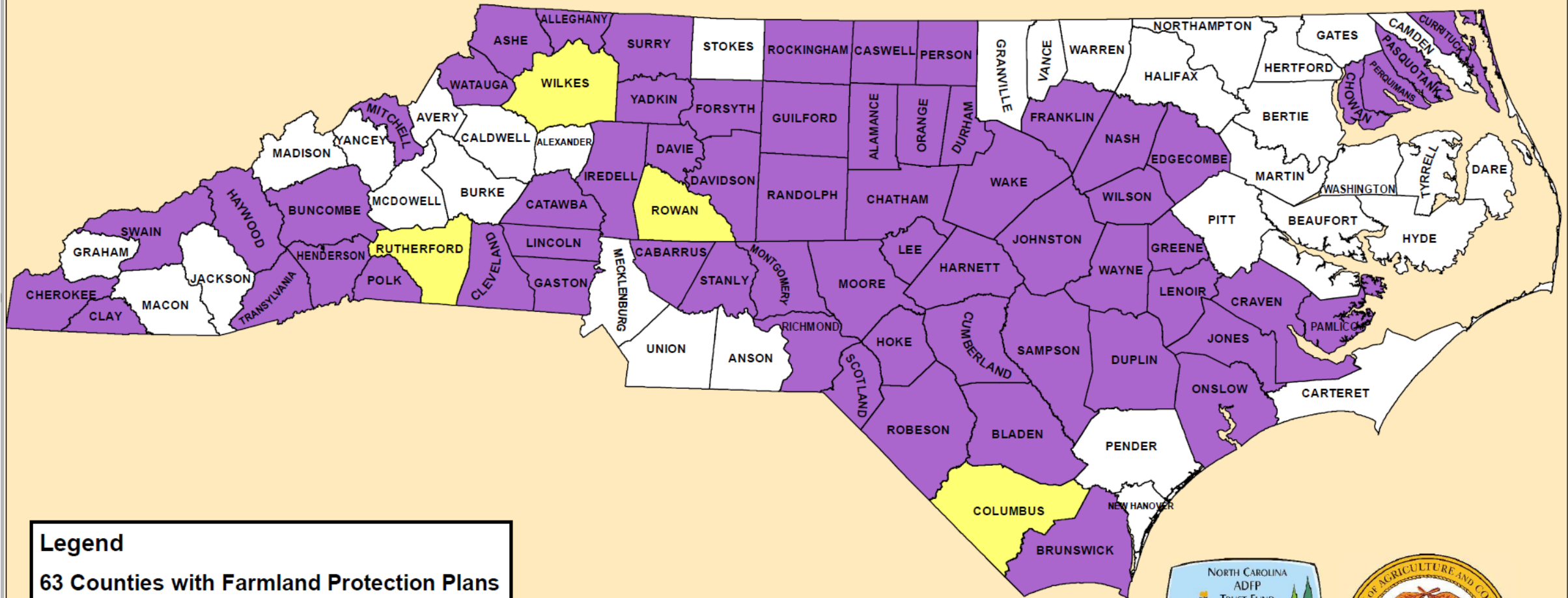
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Farmland Protection Plans

- Farmland Protection Plans are strategic proposals that define how to maintain a viable agricultural economy in a county.
- These plans:
 - Describe existing agricultural activity in a county,
 - List challenges to continued family farming in the county,
 - List opportunities for enhancing the local agricultural economy,
 - Create a schedule for implementing the plan, and
 - Identify possible funding sources for long-term support of the plan.
- Farmland Protection Plans are approved by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and endorsed by the county Board of Commissioners.

FARMLAND PROTECTION PLANS



Legend

63 Counties with Farmland Protection Plans

NCDA&CS Approved and County Endorsed

Yes (63)

☐ No (33)

 Under Development (4)

Updated 09-02-20



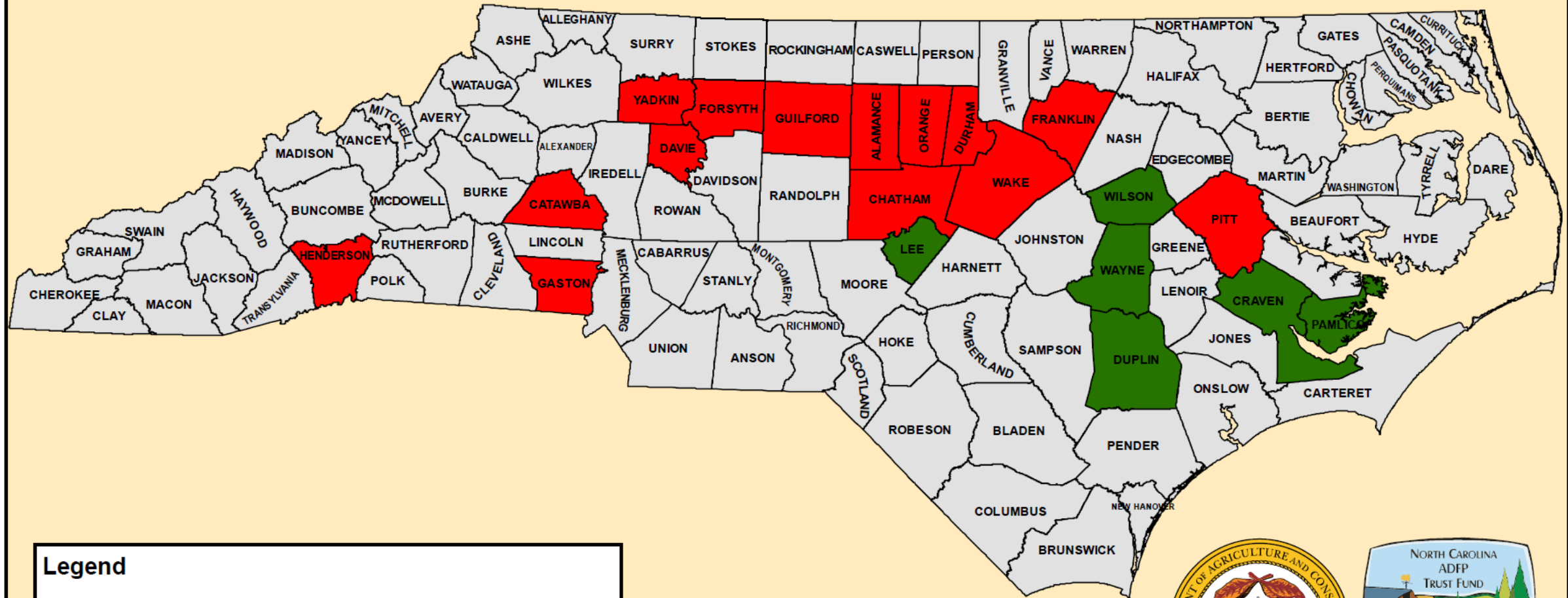
Farmland Protection Plans as a Living Document

- Problem: once an FPP is completed, it sits on a shelf.
- Yearly reviews
 - A reminder to review: when the annual VAD survey is due.
- Questions to Consider:
 - Has the agricultural activity in the county changed?
 - New USDA census data, observations, other county reports
 - Have the challenges to continued family farming in the county changed?
 - Population trends, new residential or commercial development
 - Were the opportunities for enhancing the local agricultural economy utilized?
 - Are you following the schedule for implementing the plan?
 - Have you secured funding sources for long-term support of the plan?

Cost of Community Services Studies

- Cost of Community Services Studies (CCSSs) are a case study approach used to determine the fiscal contribution of existing local land uses. Their purpose is to evaluate working and open lands on equal ground with residential, commercial, and industrial land uses.
- CCSSs are a snapshot in time of costs versus revenues for each type of land use. They provide a baseline of current information to help local officials and citizens make informed land use and policy decisions.
- Counties with CCSSs: 20
- In all 20 counties analyzed, agricultural lands use less tax dollars than they generate. Working lands in North Carolina are net providers of local tax dollars, rather than net users.
 - In North Carolina, for every \$1.00 of revenue generated by agricultural lands, the cost of community services provided is \$0.53.
 - In North Carolina, for every \$1.00 of community services provided, the revenue generated by agricultural lands is \$1.90.

COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES STUDIES



Legend

20 Counties with Cost of Community Services Studies

- Study Conducted by NC State University (14)
 Study Conducted by University of Mount Olive (6)
 None (80)

Updated 11-2-20



Agricultural Advisory Board

- When was your last meeting?
 - Regularly scheduled vs. As needed
- Did you have a quorum?
 - Too many or too few on the board
- What is the composition of your board?
 - Active farmer requirement
 - Geographically based, or at-large
 - Agricultural organizations and interests



Annual VAD Survey

- Sent to county VAD administrators during late summer
- Important statewide information used for annual reports to the legislature:
 - Number of VAD acres enrolled
 - Number of EVAD acres enrolled
 - Number of VAD farms enrolled
 - Number of EVAD farms enrolled
- Important information for other counties, the State VAD workgroup, and the public:
 - Updated contact information of VAD administrators
 - Updates to county ordinances and other farmland preservation programs
 - Dates of last Agricultural Advisory Board meeting and new members

Annual Report to Board of Commissioners and County Leadership

- The Agricultural Advisory Board is a voice of agriculture for your county.
- When compiling information for the annual VAD survey, you can provide an update to county leadership.
- A report can include the following items:
 - Statistics on VAD enrollment
 - Updates on your Farmland Protection Plan
 - Data from a Cost of Community Services Study
 - Recent data on the county's agricultural economy
 - Recent accomplishments



Saying “Thank You”

- Your VAD program is only as good as its members and support staff
- Annual VAD Breakfast
- Giving back to the future of agriculture by supporting local FFA or 4-H programs



VAD Enrollment Procedures

Action	Responsibility
Request Enrollment	
Complete Application	Enrollee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certify Engaged in Ag under NC GS 106-581.1 or is a farm under NC GS 153A-340 	Enrollee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree to prohibit nonfarm use for 10 years 	Enrollee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certify location in unincorporated area of County Or in municipality with VAD MOU 	Enrollee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Draft Conservation Agreement 	Enrollee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deposit of Filing Fee 	Enrollee
Verification of applicability and compliance	AG Agent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forward application, Conservation Agreement and memo, indicating compliance with regulations to, County Ag Advisory Board (AAB) 	AG Agent
Recommendation of Enrollment	County AAB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forward application, Agreement, and memo of recommendation (accept or reject) from AAB to County Commission 	County AAB
Acceptance/Rejection of Enrollment and Agreement	County Commission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to Landowner indicating AAB and County Commission Findings 	AG Agent
If Accepted	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement to County Clerk/Record of Deeds for Recording. GIS Department for inclusion on layer 	AG Agent
If Denied	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to Applicant re denial and grounds 	AG Agent or AAB

Withdraw from VAD Program

Activity	Responsibility
Withdrawing from VAD Program	
By Landowner	
• Form to County AAB requesting withdrawal	Enrollee
• Conservation Agreement Revocation Document	Enrollee
• Filing Fee (\$10)	Enrollee
Verification of Documents	AG Agent
• Forward memo and copy of documents to AAB and County Commission Consent item – receive as information	AG Agent
• Conservation Agreement Revocation Document forwarded to Record of Deeds revoking Agreement with filing fee (\$10). GIS Department for removal from layer.	AG Agent

Activity	Responsibility
Withdrawing from VAD Program	
By AAB for Cause	
• Form to County AAB requesting removal - with documentation	AG Agent
• Letter to Landowner offering ‘hearing before AAB’	AG Agent
• Completion of Conservation Agreement Revocation Document	AG Agent
• Hearing with Landowner for Consideration of Conservation Agreement Revocation Document	AAB
If Revocation proceeds	
• Forward memo and copy of documents County Commission Consent item – receive as information	AG Agent
• Conservation Agreement Revocation Document forwarded to Record of Deeds revoking Agreement with filing fee (\$10). GIS Department for removal from layer.	AG Agent

Updating GIS

- Counties with VAD GIS layers should share these with NCDA&CS
- NCDA&CS shares this data with NCDOT
- Up to date information provides the most benefit for VAD members
 - Owner names
 - Mailing Address (Street, City, St, Zip)
 - County
 - Acres
 - Date Enrolled
 - Date Renewed – If applicable
 - PIN (Parcel identification number)
 - Applicant (if different from owner)
 - Application approval date
 - Agreement ID
 - Application Data
 - Historically Enrolled
 - EVAD – (Yes No)



Search

Find address or place

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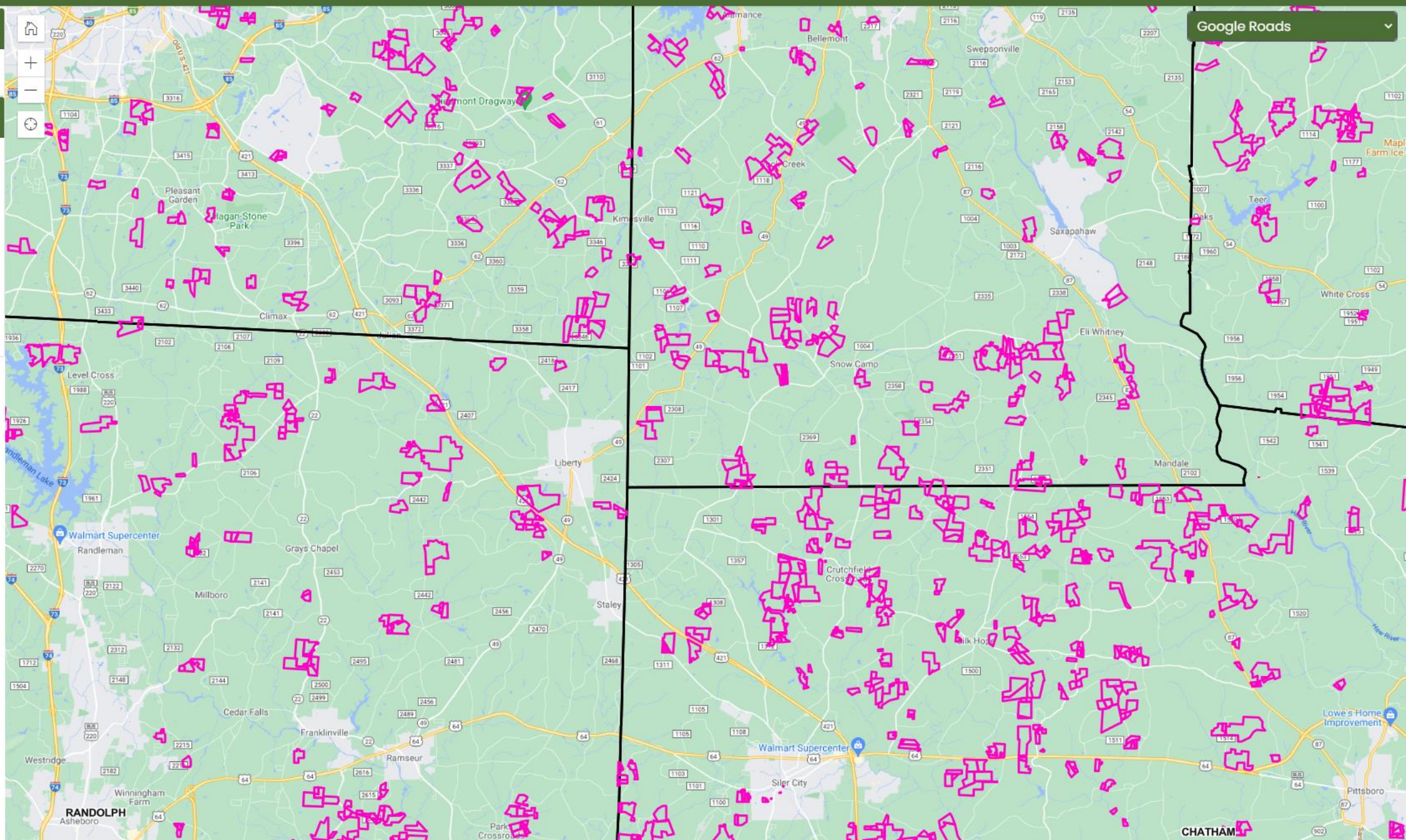


☐ Parcels

☒ County



Disclaimer



Working with Other Departments

- How many county departments outside the agricultural networks know about VAD?
- Relationships are important for the most effective program.
- Who to connect with:
 - Board of Commissioners
 - Clerk to the Board
 - County Manager
 - County Attorney
 - Register of Deeds
 - GIS
 - Planning and Zoning
 - Tax Assessor

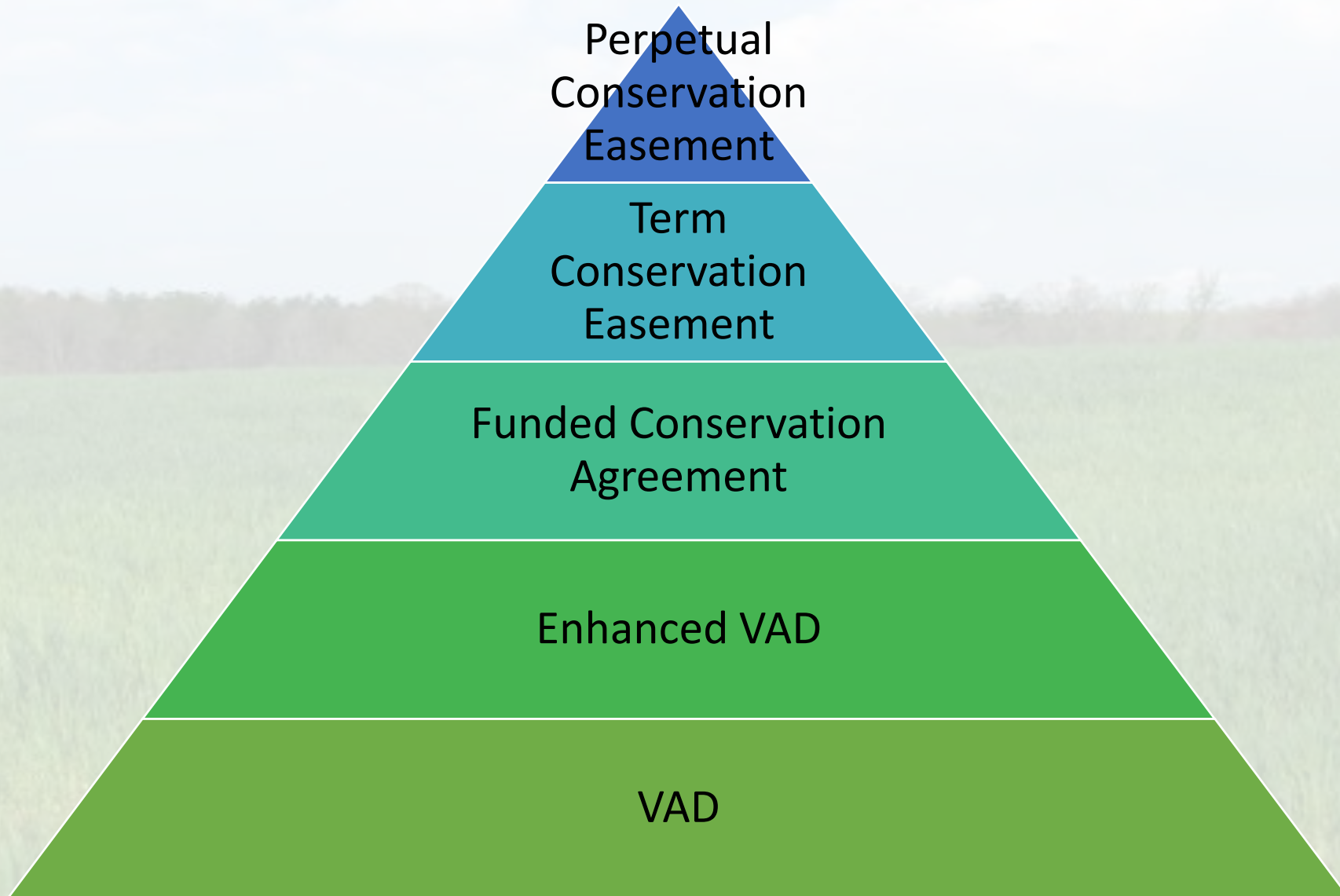
Your Agricultural Partners

- Who do you share a building or office with?
- Building support networks with your agricultural partners
 - Who could step in when a county VAD administrator leaves?
- VAD, FPP, CCSS as part of the county toolbox
- Other organizations to connect with:
 - Farm Bureau
 - Grange
 - FFA
 - 4-H
 - Ruritans
 - Commodity associations
 - Business community
 - Local community college (if it has an agricultural program)
 - Other counties with a VAD program

Enhanced VAD

- Enhanced VAD (EVAD) member benefits are the same as VAD, plus:
 - May receive up to 25% of its gross sales from the sale of nonfarm products and still qualify as a bona fide farm
 - Eligible to receive a higher percentage of cost share funds under the Agriculture Cost Share Program.
- Higher level of protection because of the 10-year irrevocable conservation agreement
- Must be recorded

Hierarchy of Farmland Preservation





Questions?

